

Venerable Hammalawa Saddhatissa Mahanayaka Thera

The 10th Anniversary Celebrations of the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Center well deserves a thorough appreciation of the life and work of the late Nayaka Thera. It is recorded that he passed away a decade ago. This means that he missed the third millennium by a narrow margin of a little more than ten years. But what he has left behind for posterity both as monk as well as student of Buddhism will carry his memory through very much alive for many more centuries of the third millennium.

Buddhist studies in the western world go well beyond the beginning of the twentieth century. England, Germany and France have been pioneers in the field. The landscape is dotted with stalwarts like Professor and Mrs. Rhys Davids, Miss. I.B.Horner, Professors Oldenberg and Geiger, De La Valle Poussin and Sylvan Levi, to name a few among many. While London was doing the pioneering work to kindle an interest in Buddhism as a religion and more serious involvement in Buddhist studies, Venerable Saddhatissa had the fortune to be born into a Sinhala family in Sri Lanka, giving him an opportunity to take to the life of a Buddhist monk at a very early age.

Maturing in life as monk in his own home country, he is supposed to have left for India which is the original home of the Buddha and Buddhism and pursued his Buddhist research studies there. With years of experience gathered there as a monk and a student of Buddhism, he had an unquestionably sound foundation for the immense work he undertook afterwards as a missionary in the western world and a Buddhist scholar. He worked for his Ph.D. in England under a distinguished Professor like A. K. Warder. In later years, he worked with Professor Warder, assisting him in the compilation of the Pali Concordance. This took him to Toronto, Canada for a brief spell.

Taking up his position as the head of the London Buddhist Vihara, Venerable

Saddhatissa became both a wonderful host to the visiting Sri Lankans to Britain and a grand counsellor to all, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist who sought advice and instruction with regard to the message of Buddhism to the world. The London Buddhist Vihara became a lively centre of Buddhist activities under his dynamic and versatile leadership. In addition to being a lively communicator of the Dhamma to the English speaking world in the west, he also took to Buddhist scholarship seriously. He is the author of several distinguished books, both in the areas of Buddhist philosophy and Pali Buddhist literature. He has a very pioneering work called Buddhist Ethics. Yet another book on Buddhism called The Buddha's Way.

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